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Letter dated 10 April 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter from Syrian civil society groups (see annex). I should be most grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Karen **Pierce**

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Annex to the letter dated 10 April 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

We draw your attention today to a lethal chemical attack perpetrated in the city of Duma in Eastern Ghouta on 7 April that took the lives of at least 42 Syrian civilians, primarily children and women. All 500 cases treated by doctors and nurses in Duma exhibited symptoms consistent with exposure to a chemical agent, including respiratory distress, central cyanosis, foaming at the mouth and corneal burns.

This devastating chemical attack took place less than two weeks after Syrian civil society groups wrote to the President of the Security Council addressing the failure of Member States to enforce Security Council resolution 2401 (2018) and protect Syrian civilians. In our letter, we expressed our deep concern for the safety of our people in Eastern Ghouta and warned that the vicious cycle of impunity would allow further atrocities to take place. As predicted, the failure to enforce resolution 2401 (2018) emboldened the Syrian regime and its allies to use every conventional and non-conventional weapon in their arsenal to kill, starve, maim, gas and forcibly displace the civilians of Eastern Ghouta. We warned that absent any consequences for its war crimes, the regime would only escalate its military campaign against Syrian civilians. We warned of impending massacres such as this most recent chemical attack on Duma. Tragically, we were right.

These actions are part of a calculated pattern of violence perpetrated by the regime that flouts any efforts to pursue a political solution. After the adoption of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), in which the Council demanded that the Syrian regime dismantle its chemical weapons programme, the Syrian people have suffered hundreds of chemical attacks at the hands of the Assad regime, including from sarin and weaponized poisonous chlorine gas. Less than one week ago, we observed the one-year anniversary of the regime's sarin attack in Khan Shaykhun, Idlib. Then, as now, it is clear that in the absence of any credible consequences, Assad will commit whatever war crime he deems necessary to achieve a military solution.

Members of the Security Council must uphold their responsibilities under international law to protect the civilians of Syria. More than statements, resolutions and condolences, we call on members of the Council to:

(a) **Take all necessary steps to protect Syrian civilians and deter future indiscriminate attacks**. In resolution 2401 (2018), the Security Council authorized a nationwide ceasefire: it is high time members of the Council acted in their own capacity to enforce it. Syrians cannot afford to wait any longer;

(b) **Ensure that all war crimes are met with credible consequences**. The failure to answer Assad's war crimes with credible consequences has encouraged him to ramp up his killing through chemical and conventional means. Red lines must be enforced, not only for chemical attacks, but for all indiscriminate attacks on civilians. This response must not be one-off, but must instead be part of a sustained, comprehensive strategy designed to deter all indiscriminate attacks, not solely the chemical atrocity in Duma;

(c) **Urgently deliver life-saving humanitarian aid**, including food, medicine and shelter, to the millions of displaced people, particularly those currently residing in Idlib, whose urgent needs are growing. Cross-border humanitarian assistance to Idlib is urgently needed now;

(d) **Establish an international criminal tribunal** to pursue accountability for all war crimes committed since the start of the Syrian crisis. Due to Russia's repeated

use of the veto, it is clear that a referral to the International Criminal Court is blocked. It is therefore incumbent on members of the General Assembly to act in their own capacity to establish a criminal tribunal.

The Syrian people are defenceless against the ongoing slaughter by the regime and its allies. How many more innocent lives lost will it take for Member States to take meaningful action to save us?

Signatories:

Violations Documentation Center in Syria
Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
Women Now for Development
Local Development and Small Projects Support
Baytna Syria
Alseeraj for Development and Healthcare
Shaml, Syrian civil society coalition
Dawlaty
Citizenship League
The Day After
The Syrian Forum
Syria Civil Defence/The White Helmets
Local Administration Councils Unit